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ABSTRACT

This position paper explores American under-development in the area of policy formation concerning children and families. Three pressing problems believed to be faced by American children and their parents are presented and discussed. These are: (1) the depopulation of the family, said to be largely attributable to the changes, assumptions, and newly generated demands for consumption, and not to the faults of individual parents; (2) the intellectualization of the child, said to originate in the nature of the American economic system and its influence on the school systems -- quantifying, measuring, and using these measurements to perpetuate the relative positions of existing groups in the society; and, (3) the problem of perpetuation of exclusion, siad to affect children characterized by the four factors of race, poverty, handicap, and parents overwhelmed by life. This last problem is discussed and explained in terms of the economic system. A final section on individual uplift and social change concludes by underlining the posited contrast between individual blame and uplift, and the need for social and economic change. (Author/AM)

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DRAFT --Position Paper

DO AMERICANS REALLY LIKE CHILDREN?

Kenneth Keniston

Carnegie Council on Children

given at

American Orthospychiatric Association Meeting

Washington,D.C.

March 23, 1975

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Do Americans Really Like Children?

Kenneth Keniston

Two and a half years ago, the Carnegie Council on Children was established by the New York foundation of the same name. We are a small private commission, a group of 12 women and men chosen not to represent particular constituencies, professions, or groups, but because we share a common concern with the needs of American children and their families. We are not a blue ribbon group, but simply a dozen individuals from diverse backgrounds, fields, and perspectives, most of us in our thirties and forties, most of us parents. Assisted by an able young staff, we have not been doing original scientific research, but rather attempting to learn from the experience, action, and studies of others where children fit today in America, what are the unmet needs and problems of American children and families, and which of these problems most urgently deserve our response. Our work is not yet complete, so that what I say here, although a kind of introduction to some of the perspectives of the Council, must be understood as my own view, often stolen from other Council and staff members, but not necessarily reflecting their opinions. In the course of the next year and a half, we will be issuing a series of reports and other communications, and these will present the conclusions of the Council more adequately.

Let me start from the questions with which we began our work: Do Americans really like children? Are we the child-centered, child-loving people we claim to be? We began with these questions because of facts with which all of you are so familiar that I need not recite them in detail.

Recall that while we promise health and physical vitality to all our children, our infant mortality rates place us fifteenth among the forty-two nations ranked by the United Nations, just below East Germany and just above Hong Kong. Infant mortality rates for American non-whites are much higher, and among groups like American Indians, they approach the rates in the most underdeveloped countries. And we are among the very few modern nations that do not guarantee adequate health care to mothers and children.

Or consider the nutrition of American children. A United States Department of Agriculture survey showed that between 1955 and 1965, a decade of rising affluence and agricultural productivity, the percentage of diets deficient in one or more essential nutrients actually increased. And today, for all of the programs that try to provide adequate nutrition to American children, millions remain hungry and malnourished.

We say that children have a right to the basic material necessities of life. Yet of all age groups in America, children are the most likely to live in abject poverty. One-sixth of all American children live below the officially defined poverty line, while one-third live below that level defined by the government as "minimum but adequate". And we are the only industrial democracy that does not have a system of income supports for families with children.

We say that we are a nation that believes fervently in families as the best way of raising children. Yet, our families are becoming increasingly depopulated. Divorce rates have risen more than 700% in the last half century, and today at least a million children are affected by divorce each year. The proportion of our children raised in single-parent families has increased astronomically in the last two decades. And we are virtually

alone among industrialized nations in that we have no national child or family policy, no comprehensive system of family services and supports, no way of helping children and families navigate the crises of family life.

We say we believe all children are entitled to loving, responsive care. But a third of mothers of pre-school children are in the labor force, and a half of mothers of school age children work outside the home. And we have yet to provide any system to assure that these children receive adequate care when their parents are working. Here, again, we are backward by the standards of other nations of the world.

We say that we value children and acknowledge that value tangibly through the children's deduction in our tax system. Yet that deduction gives the greatest tax credit to families that need financial help the least. To a very rich family, two children are worth the equivalent of $750 or more in a direct grant from the government; to a middle income family, two children are worth only $300; a family too poor to pay any taxes receives nothing at all.

We say we have created a school system that equalizes opportunity and the chance to succeed for all children. Yet 12 years of public schooling actually increases the gap between rich and poor students. Far from equalizing opportunity, our school system exaggerates the inequalities with which children enter the schools. We have yet to devise ways to fulfill the promise that schooling would provide all children with equal opportunity.

All of you could cite other statistics that make the same point. The conclusion is simple: we are a rich, prosperous nation, endowed not only with material goods but with knowledge and with human talent. We pride ourselves on our devotion to children. Yet if we search for programs that support the

development of children and help meet the needs of their families, we are a backward society, an underdeveloped nation. Other countries of the world may look to us for technological advances and material achievements, but we must look to every other industrial nation in the world for more advanced and adequate supports for children and families.

Why is this? Why are we an underdeveloped nation in our policies toward children and families? Is it because at some level, we secretly hate and despise our children, because our lip-service to the next generation is insincere? Or are there other reasons?

To answer these questions requires us to look at some of the most pressing problems that face American children and their parents. Here I will discuss three of the problems that deserve attention, so as to indicate the general nature of our answer. These problems are what I will call the depopulation of the family, the intellectualization of the child, and the perpetuation of exclusion.

The Depopulation of the Family

In 1974, a crucial watershed was crossed in the history of the American family. For the first time, more than one-half of all school-aged children in two-parent families had mothers who worked outside the home, mostly full-time. For children under six in two-parent families the proportion of working mothers has reached one-third, and continues to grow rapidly. In single-parent families, mothers are even more likely to work for wages. For the first time in our national history, most children now have mothers who work outside the home, and most of these mothers work full-time. The speed with which women have entered the labor force is staggering; in every category, there has been a doubling or trebling of labor force participation by women with young children since the end of the second World War. The modal

American family today is a two-parent family where the mother works outside the home.

A particularly depopulated set of families are those with one parent. In 1948, only one out of 14 children under six were brought up in a single-parent family. In 1973, that proportion had doubled to one out of seven children. Behind this increase is the extraordinary rise in the number of divorced, separated, or unwed parents, almost all mothers. Between 1960 and 1972, the proportion of children living in such families increased from one in 20 to one in eight.

Another related trend is the disappearance of non-parental relatives from families, and especially from single-parent families. In 1949, about half of children under six in single-parent families lived with another relative who was the head of the family. By 1973, this proportion had dropped to one in five. In less than a quarter of a century, the presence of other relatives, usually grandparents, aunts and uncles, in the single-parent family has dropped from 50% to 20%.

Other children are also increasingly scarce in our families. At the peak of the post-war baby boom, the median completed family size was Today, completed family size is below the zero population growth rate, about 1.9. years ago, the average child had two or more siblings; today, the average child has one or less.

Let me cite one final statistic, the increasing proportion of births that are illegitimate. In 1960, about one out of every 20 live births was illegitimate; by 1972, this figure had increased to one out of every eight live births.

Taken together, these statistics--mostly culled from Urie Bronfenbrenner's work, which he will present at this meeting--mean that the family is increasingly emptied of people of all kinds, and in particular of kin. More mothers

in the labor force, astronomical increases in the proportion of single-parent families, the disappearance of other relatives from the family, the sharp decline in the number of siblings, rapid rises in rates of divorce, separation, and illegitimacy--all these factors interact to mean that more and more children's lives are spent in homes empty of people for longer and longer stretches of time. With a speed that has few precedents in our history, the nature of family life in this country has changed, and in ways that we have yet to appreciate, much less respond to.

What has replaced the people in the family? For one, television has become a peculiar kind of flickering blue parent for many children, a technological babysitter, an electronic wonder that occupies more of the waking hours of American children than any other single force, including both parents and schools.

A second replacement is, of course, the peer group. With parents, older relatives, and siblings increasingly absent from the family, other unrelated children play a larger and larger role in socializing the young.

The third institution that has replaced the child's family members are schools, pre-schools, and the various child care arrangements that must be made by working parents. The average age of entry into some form of schooling or pre-schooling has decreased rapidly during the last decades, while more and more children are involved in some form of out-of-family child care, be it a neighbor lady, a licensed or unlicensed family day care center, a babysitter, a play group, or far more rarely a day care center. Whether we like it or not, milions of American children are today being raised for larger and larger portions of time by non-relatives, often completely outside of their family.

Finally, there are growing numbers of children who are simply not cared for at all for increasing periods of time--latch-key children who stay alone in empty houses; children locked at home while their parents work; children who play unattended in the streets. For them, there is simply no replacement at all for the family members who are not there.

The depopulation of the family and the replacement of family members by television, peer groups, non-familial caretakers--or no one--contradicts a central American value to which we all pay lip-service, and which most of us sincerely believe. This is the conviction that, other things equal, families provide the best possible environment for rearing the young. Since the first European settlements on these shores, the importance and sanctity of the family has been constantly reasserted. Even today, that majority of American mothers who work outside the home tend to feel guilty, inadequate, and remiss for fear they are neglecting their children. We persist in considering ourselves a family-centered, family-oriented nation. Perhaps as a result, we are so blind to the staggering changes that are overtaking our families.

But why have these changes occurred? Are they the result of the negligence or the hostility of individual parents? Do they reflect the growing indifference of American mothers and fathers to the fate of their children? Or are they the result of other forces in our society? Are we witnessing a "flight from the family" that springs primarily from the individual psychology of American parents? Or are parents themselves pushed out of the family by social and economic forces over which they have little control?

My answer is that the explanation does not lie with the individual motivations of American parents, but rather with the social and economic pressures of our larger society. Part of the Council's work has consisted

in an effort to trace the changes in the experience of parents and children throughout our history. Many factors have helped transform American families from largely self-sufficient farm families of colonial days to the rapidly emptying dormitories that they are becoming today. But of all the forces that have changed family life, changes in our economic system are most fundamental. To summarize a long story in a few words, the disappearance of the agricultural family, where mother, father, and children worked together at the tasks of farming was stimulated above all by the development of national agricultural markets, by the specialization of farm production, and by the growth of industry and commerce in the 19th century. The family was gradually redefined not as a productive unit, but as a retreat from the harsh work-a-day world; woman's role was transformed from that of co-worker in the family economy to pure guardian of the hearth and aethereal socializer of the young; children were redefined not as economic assets to the family, but as future producers who, as adults, should aspire to rise above their parents through hard work to economic success.

In the 19th century, we developed the first universal public school system in history, thus replacing many of the family's traditional functions. But from the start, that public school system was explicitly justified by its early advocates like Horace Mann in economic terms--as a means of providing trained manpower for the economy, while socializing all children into American values so that social discontent would be reduced.

If today we ask what single factor contributes most to the entry of women with small children into the labor force, the answer is clear: economic pressures. The highest rates of female labor force participation, for example, occur in families of average and below average income. In these

families, women work not primarily or only for purposes of fulfillment and dignity, much less in pursuit of exciting and challenging professional careers. They work because their income is needed to provide their families with a decent standard of living. And most mothers without husbands work because their income is the only source of sustenance to themselves and their children. Women's work is concentrated in the most underpaid, boring, and menial occupations. Even when women do the same jobs as men, they were traditionally, and still are, paid less.

Today, as before, the needs of our economy play a central role in transforming the families of American children. For it is useful to our economy to have available a large reservoir of employable females who are willing to accept dead-end jobs, to do without fringe benefits, to perform boring, menial, and even degrading work--all at low wages. The availability of such workers keeps profits up, keeps prices down, permits services to be performed for low rates, and provides, as we are witnessing today, a pool of workers without job guarantees who are among the first to be laid off in times of economic recession.

The entry of women, including mothers, into the occupational system seems to me irreversible and in many cases desirable. Women are simply gaining a right that men have always had--the right to seek productive, rewarding, and remunerative employment. And there is no evidence that maternal employment harms children, unless women feel pressured or coerced to work. But approximately 50% of all women who work say that they would not do so if they did not need the money. To my knowledge, no one on our Council believes that women should not have the same opportunities for productive work that men have. Nor do we believe that we should pressure women to stay at home. Our effort is not to condemn but to try to understand.

In seeking this understanding, we have been led again and again to the nature and values of our economic system. It is an economic system that defines "work" only as paid participation in the labor force, but does not consider what women and men do at home, in particular the rearing of children, as an economically productive or rewardable activity. The growing depopulation of our families is largely attributable to the changes, assumptions, and needs of our economy. It is not the "fault" of individual parents, nor does it reflect any sudden decline in the devotion of Americans as individuals to their own children. Rather the draining of the family reflects the fact that we are all pressured by newly generated demands for consumption, and assumptions about what does and does not constitute valuable work. If families in America become little more than dormitories, quick service restaurants, recreation centers and consumption units, we must look not to the vices of American parents but to the pressures of the economy for the main explanation.

The Intellectualization of the Child

I noted that one major substitute for family members is out-of-family child care, pre-schooling, and formal schooling. As the importance of family members in the rearing of children has declined, ever since the mid-19th century the role of non-family members and formal institutions has increased. The average age of entry into some form of non-familial care and/or pre-schooling is today dropping rapidly, while at the other end of the educational scale, the average age of school leaving has increased by one year a decade throughout this century.

Schools or preschools, and the values which they covertly or overtly transmit, are thus becoming increasingly important in the child's life. They are, next to families and possibly television, the major socializing influence on our children. It therefore behooves us to examine carefully what values and human qualities are stressed in child care programs, pre-schools, and schools, and to ask whether these values accord with our own aspirations for the next generation.

To state the conclusion in a few words, I believe that we are witnessing a growing emphasis upon the child as a brain, upon the cultivation of narrowly defined cognitive skills and abilities, and above all upon the creation, through our pre-schools and schools, of a race of children whose value and progress is judged primarily by their capacity to do well on tests of IQ, reading readiness, or school achievement. Although children are, like adults, whole people, full of fantasies, imagination, artistic capacities, physical grace, social relationships, cooperation,

initiative, industry, love, and joy, the overt and above all the covert structure of our system of pre-schooling and schooling largely ignores these other human potentials to concentrate upon the cultivation of a narrow form of intellect.

Recall the educational response to the launching of Sputnik. It was to attempt to create, through schooling, a generation of Americans who would be capable of beating the Russians in the race to the moon, the planets, and the stars. This objective was translated into a heavy emphasis on mathematics, basic science, and those other technical skills thought to be important in this peculiar quest for international prestige. Studies of cognitive development burgeoned throughout this period, and school after school adopted a no-nonsense, test-performance and IQ-score based system of promotions and rewards, all sanctioned by the fear that we were falling behind the Russians. In this push for measurable cognitive achievement, other qualities were quietly discarded: the valuable ideas of progressive education were forgotten in a one-sided critique of its excesses; the notion of children as whole people, while often mentioned and occasionally implemented, was largely subordinated to the rush for cognitive development.

With the coming of the 1960's, and with the sudden rediscovery of poverty and racism in America, new initiatives were made to improve the quality of schooling and pre-schooling, especially for poor and non-white children. The original architects of the War on Poverty had in mind a many-leveled battle, including the creation of jobs, income supplementation, and the provision of services to all families and children who needed them.

But characteristically in our national experience, the jobs and income components of this war were either forgotten or implemented at best in a half-hearted way. One of the human service programs that was implemented was the Head Start program. Its architect, Dr. Julius Richmond, will testify that this program as originally conceived had many objectives, among which the raising of IQ scores and the development of reading readiness was secondary. These other objectives included the empowerment of parents, the provision of services like health and dental care to children, and so on.

But when the time came to evaluate Head Start programs, evaluation consisted almost entirely in assessing whether they succeeded in irreversibly increasing the IQ scores of the children involved. The notion of most evaluators has been that "success" for Head Start meant a program that, in a few hours each day for a few months or a year, could overcome the overwhelming disadvantages of life for children born into poverty, into the segregation of a race-divided society, or into the squalor that characterizes the communities of millions of American children. It is a tribute to our optimism, if to nothing else, that we ever thought we could do so much for so many for so little.

Underlying much Head Start work was a theory of cultural deprivation. Essentially, this theory said that certain children--largely non-white and poor--were deprived of the cultural stimulation which middle class white children receive. Allegedly, their homes were without books, their parents did not interact with them verbally, and so on. To overcome these "deficits", it was argued, programs of cultural enrichment and intellectual stimulation were required. Thus, Head Start programs in general attempted

to compensate for the alleged deficiencies of the child's family.

What is noteworthy is that so few asked at the time what was causing "cultural deprivation", who or what was doing the depriving, and whether the basic deprivation was really cultural at all. The term "culturally deprived" became, in short order, a euphemism for poor and black. For many Americans, it was another stigmatizing label, a polite way of pointing to the alleged "inadequacies" of families condemned to the cellar of our economy. There are of course two sides to deprivation: the deprived and the depriving. But little attention was paid to the factors in our society that might prevent some families from providing their children with cultural riches, intellectual stimulation, and rich verbal interaction. Most important, the concept of cultural deprivation, though benign in origin, neglected the basic question as to whether the deprivations of most families and children were primarily cultural at all. It seems an odd way of defining the problems of economically destitute families in inner-city ghettos, migrant camps, impoverished Apalachian villages or tenant farmer shacks to call their primary deprivation "cultural". On the face of it, it would make more sense to describe these "deprivations" as economic and political. And there were a few voices that noted these problems. But by and large, they went unheard.

As a result, few Americans ever asked whether a program aimed at attacking a symptom could possibly hope to succeed in its extraordinarily ambitious goals without also attacking the causes of that symptom. As has generally happened in our history, this reform program often ended by stigmatizing those whom it was intended to benefit, while it drew attention away from the root causes of the problem that it tried to solve.

In my own view, Head Start programs have been extraordinarily successful, even given the inadequacy of the theory on which they were evaluated. They showed that it was indeed possible to increase the ability of children in the bottom of our society to do well on tests. As long as children remain in most Head Start programs their gains, even measured in the narrow terms of test performance, are significant and marked. Head Start programs did succeed in empowering parents, and they have provided desperately needed health, dental and other services to a few children. But, a few hours a day in a cultural enrichment program for a few months or a year cannot hope forever to reverse the toll upon families and children of the economic and racial structure of our society.

Thus, Head Start, originally defined as only one component of a broader attack on poverty, and not conceived as primarily cognitive in its objectives, was quickly redefined as a program whose outcome and success was measured in terms of gains in the ability to do well on standardized tests. Head Start illustrates a broader tendency in our society, the tendency to rank and rate children, to reward and stigmatize them, according to their ability to do well in the narrow tasks that schools (or we psychologists) believe we can measure quantitatively. At every level of our pre-school and school system, this same ability to do well on tests is a primary determinant of the child's progress and position in the world of school and, to a large degree, in the later world of adults. Access to the "high" tracks, "superior" ability groupings, and even to good schools themselves is primarily determined by ability to do well on tests. We talk a great deal about the other human qualities of children, but when the push comes to shove --when it is a matter of promotion, receiving credentials, being praised or punished--it is the child who has learned

to master test-taking who gets the goodies.

This one-sided emphasis on test-taking ability extends throughout our entire educational system. It persists despite the lack of evidence that the ability to do well on tests predicts much of anything about the ability to do well in life. But try getting into the college or preparatory track in most American high schools without the ability to do well on IQ forms, achievement measures, and classroom tests. And try getting into a college whose B.A. provides a passport to a rewarding, prestigious, and remunerative job without demonstrating the same ability at the end of high school. Or try getting into a law school or medical school without first getting high scores on their tests. Our schools are so structured that without the ability to get good "objective test scores" or high "grade point averages", a child is condemned to almost certain failure.

We could live more easily with this fact were it not for our professed devotion to a large number of human qualities that we say we value above the ability to do well on tests. We say that we want our children to be physically vital, caring, imaginative, resourceful, cooperative and morally committed. We talk a great deal about all of the qualities that we value in children, all of the virtues that we wish our schools to instill into them, all of the kinds of human merit that we value. In fact, on our lists of our hopes for the next generation, the ability to do well on tests does not appear at all. But in our educational system, whose power over the lives of our children increases annually, it is test-taking ability, and the narrow and learned form of intelligence that test scores reflect, that calls the shots.

Why is this? Is it because American parents and teachers are hypocritical in the lip-service they pay to human values other than narrowly-defined cognitive ability? Or is it, perhaps, because we are all responding to similar pressures in our society, pressures over which we have little control?

Once again, our answer is not to blame teachers or parents, but rather to point to the pressures of a modern technological society, and ultimately to the forces of our economy as embodied in the tracking and selection procedures for our occupational system.

Ours is a highly developed technological economy. Our society has also adopted, usually without knowing it, the implicit ideology of technism, an ideology that among other things places central value on what can be measured with numbers, assigns numbers to what cannot be measured, and redefines everything else as a recreation, self-expression, or entertainment. The development of so-called objective measures--in fact not at all objective--of IQ and performance is another expression of our propensity to label, grade, and rank individuals by numerical standards. We speak of a $50,000 a year man, of a $100,000 house, and of a child of an IQ of 95. We measure the effectiveness of education by whether or not it produces measurable income increments, not by whether it improves the quality of life of those who are educated. And we measure the success of individual schools not in terms of the kinds of human beings that they promote, but in terms of the increases in reading scores which they produce. Asked to endorse this narrow standard of measurement, most of us would rebel, asserting other values as more important. But in practice, we have allowed this standard, so central to our economic system and our

way of thinking about it, to become the central yardstick for our definition of children's worth.

A related characteristic of our highly developed technological economy is its need for some mechanism to sort individuals into various occupational slots. In principle, there might be a variety of ways of doing this. But we use our school system as a tracking and channeling mechanism for the work force. The tracking that usually begins in first grade feeds ultimately into the many tracks of our adult occupational system. And we all know that by the time a poor, black, handicapped or uncared-for child reaches third or fourth or fifth grade, a consistent position in the bottom track of the grade has become an almost inescapable adult destiny. Thus, the intellectualization of the child reflects the schools' role in classifying and sorting the labor force.

Were there time, it would be important to discuss the origins of the testing movement. Given what we today know about the racial, economic, and cultural biases inherent in so-called objective tests, it is not surprising to learn that many of the early advocates of intelligence testing were explicit racists, who believed that their results showed the constitutional degeneracy of Blacks, Mediterraneans, Slavs, and Jews. By way of summary, it seems fair to say that intelligence testing has overall served to perpetuate the status quo, assuring that most of the children who begin at the bottom will end at the bottom, while most of those who start with what we call "advantages" will end up retaining them.

In tracing the origins and causes of the intellectualization of the child, we are led step by step back to the nature of our economic system, to the reflection in our schools of our economically-derived lust to

quantify and measure, to the utilization of schooling as a means of providing a suitably tracked and channeled labor force, to the use of schools and tests as a means of perpetuating the relative social positions of existing groups in American society. It is not that teachers or parents are to blame, or that the values that we proclaim for our schools and for our children are hypocritical. It is, rather, that we are the unwitting accomplices and victims of structures in our society related to the ideology and workings of our economic system.

The Perpetuation of Exclusion

The two problems I have so far mentioned affect all American children, rich and poor, black and white, male and female. The problem to which I now turn is the problem of the excluded quarter, of children born in the cellar of our society and systematically brought up to remain there. This is a problem that also effects and involves us all, although some of us are unwittingly the short-term beneficiaries of this exclusion, while others are its undeniable victims.

We estimate that one-quarter of all American children today are being brought up to fail. This figure is an estimate, but we believe it to be on the conservative side. The children about whom I am talking are children who are being actively harmed today, deprived of the opportunity to realize a significant portion of their human potential, injured, hurt, deprived at times even of the right to live. Four factors cooperate in this process of their exclusion. The first is race; the second is poverty; the third is handicap; and the fourth is being born of parents too overwhelmed by life to be able to care responsively and lovingly for the child.

Let me once again regale you with statistics. One out of every five children in America is non-white, and these children must somehow cope with the persistent institutional and psychological racism of our society. One out of every three children lives below the minimum adequate budget established by the Department of Labor, and each of these children must face the multiple scars of poverty. One out of every 12 children is born with a major or minor handicap, and all of these children face the possible stigmas and social disabilities that accompany any handicap. One out of every 10 children has a

learning disability, and given our school system this disability will normally undermine that child's sense of herself or himself as a competent human being. Approximately one-quarter of all American children do not receive anything approaching adequate health care, nor did their mothers before they were born. It is these children whose unnecessary deaths at birth or in early childhood make our national infant mortality rates an international disgrace. Million upon millions of children live in sub-standard housing. Millions of children attend schools that are ill-equipped, run-down, inadequately financed, poorly staffed and chaotic--schools where teachers are overwhelmed by their powerlessness, relegated against their wishes to the role of keepers of order and babysitters. One out of every eight children born today is born illegitimate. We have no estimates of the number of parents who are themselves so overwhelmed by their pasts or, more important, by the pressures of their present lives that they are unable to provide responsive care for their children. But clearly there are millions of such parents, rich and poor.

All of these facts are well-known to any one concerned with the state of children in America. What makes their impact upon children so devastating is the frequency with which they occur together. For both white and non-white children, extreme poverty and growing up in a single-parent family go together. Poverty is irrevocably linked to inadequate medical care and inadequate prenatal care. Bad schools are most common for those children who most desperately need good schools, with facilities to deal with the fears and disabilities with which many children enter them. Hunger among children is especially concentrated among the poor, and a hungry child can rarely do as well in school as a child who is well-fed. The list could go on and on.

The process by which children are disabled in our society is no mystery to its victims. It is a daily process whereby physical vitality, emotional

caring, resourcefulness, and moral commitment in the child are undercut. It is also a cumulative process, in which inadequate prenatal care of mothers increases the chances that children will be born dead, defective or sickly, in which early malnutrition decreases the hope for robust physical vigor, in which inadequate health care increases the chances of illness or makes minor illness escalate into permanent handicaps. If a child is born poor, or non-white, or handicapped, or of emotionally drained parents, even the chances of physical survival to adulthood are increased.

But the most powerful forms of exclusion are not physical but social and psychological. In a land of plenty, a child of poverty grows up in want and hardship, denied those needs that most Americans consider fundamental. One reason children who are poor are greatly less likely to survive into adulthood is because they live in a world that is more dangerous than that of the prosperous--an urban world of broken stair-railings, of busy streets as playgrounds, of lead paint, rats and rat poisons--or a rural world, hidden from the view of most of us, where families cannot maintain the minimal levels of public health considered necessary a century ago. This is a world of aching teeth without dentists to fill them, of untreated colds that result in permanent deafness, a world where even a small child learns to be ashamed of the way he or she lives. And it is often a world of intense social danger, a world where adults, driven by poverty and desperation, are untrustworthy and unpredictable. Thus it can be a world where a child learns early to suppress any natural impulse to explore the world, substituting for curiosity a defensive guardedness toward novelty, a refusal to reach out for fear of being hurt. Living in a world that is indifferent or systematically hostile,

the child turns off initiative and the eagerness that other children bring to learning the basic skills of our culture.

Such children are systematically trained for failure. The covert lessons their environment teaches them about themselves and about the world are astonishingly consistent. As people they are defined as no good, inadequate, dirty, incompetent, ugly, dumb, and clumsy. The world in which they grow up is a dangerous, hostile place, where the best strategy for coping is never to venture out, totake no risks, and to stay on guard. It is this sense of self and this view of the world--constantly reenforced, rarely mitigated, in fact an accurate perception of the messages our society gives these children--that condemns them to lives of failure in social if not in human terms.

By the time a child of desperately poor parents in Appalachia reaches school age, that child is often so turned off by the world and its dangers that even the most benign forms of help and sympathy avail but little. To the inner-city black child, brought up in a dangerous, chaotic and unpredictable environment from which the most loving parents cannot project a child, the lesson that the world is a hostile place has been learned by the age of three. A child whose parents are so drained by hardships that they cannot respond to him or her in terms of his or her own needs learns in the first four years a virtually indelible lesson about the untrustworthiness and unresponsiveness of human relationships. The messages a child receives about self and world tend to be consistent and mutually reenforcing. They invoke in the child a kind of withdrawal or aggression that elicits still further messages as to the child's inadequacy and the hostility of the mainstream world.

Confronted with such facts, we commonly reassure ourselves by recounting success stories: the poor boys who made it, the blacks who became a tribute to their race, the handicapped who made contributions to our society, and the neglected children who grew up into strong, resourceful adults. But these success stories are the exceptions; they are systematically misleading. A quarter of our children are being actively harmed today, many of them in ways that no later good fortune or help can surely repair.

It takes an extraordinary parent or parents to raise an open, lively, resilient, and caring child in the slums of Harlem, in the backwaters of Appalachia, or in the migrant camps of Colorado. That as many parents succeed as do is a tribute to their miraculous tenacity, love and inspiration. But miracles occur rarely.

Were we a society politically committed to the perpetuation of a caste system, dedicated to the continuation of gross inequality, eager to waste human potential, or happy with the exclusion of a large minority of the next generation, these facts would cause us no concern. But in fact, they violate our most central values as Americans.

If any single theme dominates the social and political history of our nation, it is the continuing (though never fully successful) effort to include all those who live in this land as full citizens. Each generation, and each individual in each generation, we have promised, would have an equal chance in life. Our society, we have believed, should impose upon the child no special burdens that will limit him or her in the exercise of freedom,

in the pursuit of fulfillment. The promise we made to the 35 million immigrants who came to this land, like the promise we made to the native Americans who inhabited our continent long before white settlers arrived, was that they, too, would be included as full members of our society.

Even the most superficial reading of our history will show how far we have departed from this high ideal in the past. Exclusion is in no sense new. Slaves and their descendants, native Americans, other non-whites, immigrants, women, and a host of others have been effectively disenfranchised. But to each generation we have repeated, and we continue to repeat, the same promise: your children will be included; all of you who live here will become full members of the community of Americans. And much of our history has been an effort to confirm that promise, although in a painfully slow, erratic and incomplete way.

How, then, can we understand the perpetuation of exclusion? One answer, for almost two centuries in America, is that those who live in the cellars of our society are there because they belong there, because they lack human virtue, merit, industriousness, or talent. They are morally culpable, idle, dependent, welfare chislers, profligate, intemperate, licentious, and dangerous to the social order. They are to blame for and they deserve their own exclusion.

But there is another possibility as well. It is that the exclusion from the mainstreams of our society of a large minority of each generation is a product not of the individual viciousness, inadequacy, or immorality of those who are excluded, nor is it a result of the conscious and deliberate exploitation of the majority, but rather that it is a product of the way our

society works and has worked for more than a century.

Again it is necessary to summarize a long argument into a few sentences. The promise that we have made to each successive generation that all would be included in the mainstreams has remained persistently unfulfilled for over a century and a half. The distribution of wealth and income in this nation has not changed materially in 150 years. All of our promises of equal opportunity, all of our efforts at schooling, all of the general increases in our national prosperity, all of our efforts to reform and change and uplift those at the bottom of our society--none of these has succeeded in including those who are kept out. The core social problem behind exclusion is the problem of a society that permits and perpetuates gross economic and racial inequality.

The key explanation of exclusion lies, I believe, in the nature of our economic system, and in our passive acceptance of how that system works and of the ideology that buttresses it. It has proved economically useful (and perhaps even necessary) to our society as it industrialized to have available a relatively large minority of individuals and families driven by economic need to accept menial, dead-end, low-paying, insecure, hazardous, and boring work. In every society there are menial and boring jobs to be done. There are bed pans to be emptied in hospitals, there are grapes to be picked in California and there is cotton to be picked in Mississippi, there are shirts to be ironed, garbage to be collected, suitcases to be carried, furniture to be moved, and dishes to be washed. There are even assembly-line jobs so boring and stultifying that many workers refuse to accept them. Today, most of these jobs could be mechanized. But mechanization requires money. And when there

are workers who will accept low wages, no job guarantees or fringe benefits, in seasonal, repetitive, boring work--all because they are driven by the economic urgencies of the need to subsist--then it costs most of us less to buy the goods and services they produce. It has been this way for a long time in America and in other Western industrialized nations. It is still that way.

Exclusion persists, of course, not because of the plots or evil motives of individual entrepreneurs or average citizens. We all live in an economic system which decrees that profit, growth, and innovation are the criteria for economic survival. We did not make that system, and we must live within it until we decide to change it. Nor do those of us who benefit through cheaper services and lower prices from the existence of a large minority of economically and racially excluded Americans and their children consciously or deliberately approve that exclusion. On the contrary, most of us deplore it, and a great many of us contribute generously to the United Fund to help its victims. But in the short run we benefit--unintentionally, unknowingly--but nonetheless we benefit.

In the long run, it is another matter. In the long run we all lose. The problem of exclusion is not merely a problem for those who are excluded, but for all of the rest of us. In the long run, we lose a significant portion of the potentials for good, for contribution to our society, which excluded children could offer. In the long run, we and our children will pay a tangible price in remedial services, in social unrest and discontent, in prisons and mental hospitals. In the long run, we, and the children of the modestly

well-off and the prosperous in America, will also pay a human and moral price because we have tolerated a system in which our advantage and privilege depends, unnecessarily, upon their being people who are clearly beneath us and who do our dirty work. The short term benefits we derive from exclusion will be more than outweighed, even in narrow economic terms, by the price we who are within the mainstreams, and our children, will pay for the perpetuation of this exclusion.

Individual Uplift and Social Change

I have outlined three problems affecting children and their families in contemporary America: the depopulation of the family, the intellectualization of the child, and the perpetuation of exclusion. In each case, I have suggested that an understanding of the causes of these problems leads us not to blame the moral turpitude and failings of individuals, but to examine our entire society, and in particular the assumptions and workings of our economic system. I will conclude by underlining this contrast between the theme of individual blame and uplift on the one hand, and the need for social and economic change on the other.

We Americans have always prided ourselves upon our individualism. There is much to be proud of in our emphasis upon individual responsibility, upon the cultivation of individuality, and upon our hope that we could, in this nation, create a community out of varied individuals, each of whom possessed equal freedom to live out her or his life. That same individualism has,however, systematically blinded us to the power of social, political and above all economic forces in our lives.

In the age of Jackson, between 1820 and 1840, with the break up of the old Colonial social order, we devised a way of viewing our society and of trying to change it that embodies that individualism and has dominated our tradition as a nation ever since. In brief, we adopted the two related doctrines of equal opportunity and schooling for mobility. Our national creed came to rest upon the initial conviction that every American child has an equal chance to make his or her way to the top, and on the second assumption that the development

of a universal system of schooling would provide all children, no matter what their origins, with equal access to the skills, tools, and disciplines necessary for success.

As it happens, we know today that opportunity is not equal in America, nor has it ever been; we know that the initial inequality of condition of children largely determines the opportunities that will be open to them. We also know today that schooling, despite our success stories to the contrary, has not provided a significant avenue for upward mobility for young Americans: as I noted earlier, schooling actually tends to increase the gap between poor and rich. Nor do we have any solid evidence that success in school has much to do with success in the wider world, however we measure it. Nonetheless, these two articles of faith, the doctrines of equal opportunity and schooling for success, continue to dominate our national consciousness.

A corollary of these beliefs is our persistent American illusion that each individual's place in society is the exclusive result of his or her own efforts. Those who ended up at the bottom have thus been deemed inferior to those at the top--inferior in industriousness, in hard work, in diligence and, today, it is also assumed, inferior in IQ, intelligence, talent, or what have you. In the end, we have assumed that those who end in the basement of our society are inferior <u>morally,</u> that they suffer from that grand American trio of vices, namely, first, idleness, laziness, lack of enterprise, etc.; second, dependency, pauperism, willingness to live off of the hard work of others; and thirdly, a cluster of vices that have to do with sensuality and licentiousness--intemperance, promiscuity, degeneracy, and various other forms of sensual immorality. Though

few of us would publicly voice these sentiments in precisely these terms today, they perist as deep assumptions about those who are condemned to failure in our society. Conversely, we continue to assume that most of those who succeed are especially virtuous, that they possess the qualities of hard work, self-sufficiency, and an absence of sensual indulgence.

A further consequence of this ideology is that if individuals alone are responsible for their position in society, and thus the sum of individual efforts explains the organization of our society, reform must be directed primarily at reforming and uplifting individuals. We have traditionally paid much lip service to what we call the "environment". But that environment has been defined in an extraordinarily narrow and circumscribed way. When, today, we speak of a child coming from a "good environment", we are almost always talking about his or her parents. And when we attempt to deal with the problems confronting children or parents, we habitually fall back upon the reflex response of reforming individuals one by one. Today, the moralism in these efforts at reform is disguised behind scientific language, and most of those involved in efforts at reform honestly feel little sense of moral superiority over those whom they attempt to help. Yet the moralistic and individualistic context remains. Thus our social policies, insofar as we have had any intended to improve the lot of parents and children, have been directed not at changing the social and economic conditions that create their problems, but at uplifting the victims. I have here pointed again and again to the nature and ideology of our economic system because, of all the forces the one might single out, this one appears to be the most powerful in defining the kinds of lives we lead as parents, the kinds of futures we can offer our children, the kinds of forces that are brought to bear upon us as parents and them as the next generation.

But we have been and remain largely blind to the pervasive power of that system. Head Start is a case in point; faced with a problem that is essentially an economic and racial problem -- the problem of poverty and caste lines -- we redefined it as a problem of cultural deprivation, rarely asked even who was doing the depriving, and targeted our efforts at providing "cultural enrichment" to the victims of the process of exclusion. The rest of the abortive War on Poverty was largely forgotten--the jobs, the income supports, the other services needed by all American families. We ended up by attempting to reform the victims.

You may ask what are the implications for policy of this kind of analysis. Does it mean that our efforts to help individuals are misguided and must be abandoned? And does it mean that there is no way of improving the condition of American children and families short of a total revolution?

I believe it means neither of these things. Our individualism and our focus on reforming the victims of our society has led us to an understanding unmatched in any other nation of the world of individual psychodynamics, of the complexities of individual development, and of the intricacies of parent-child relationships. We should not throw this out. Nor should we abandon, for one minute, those programs that attempt to undo the harms that are done to families and children. We need more, not less, Head Start, more and much better education, more not less services to communities and individuals. And even if the basic structures of our society were radically transformed, we would still need all of these things.

But we also need to understand that we are applying much-needed bandaids, attempting to salvage the victims, not dealing with basic causes. And we need to

move beyond understand toward changing the undesirable features of our economic structure, even while we challenge some of the ideological assumptions by which it justifies itself. It will get us nowhere to blame evil capitalists or exploitative employers; there are evil and exploitative people in every stratum of society. The challenge is to stop blaming people and begin removing the causes of the problems facing families and children. Along with compensatory programs, we need the elimination of the entrenched barriers, the job ceilings, and the caste lines that prevent minority group members from full citizenship in our society. Along with programs to educate the poor, we need active programs of income supplementation, so that no child or family in America is deprived of the basic physical necessities of life. Along with job training programs (not so far notably successful) we need job creation programs, all in the context of a long-term effort to learn how to eliminate that secondary labor market whose continuation condemns so many of our parents and children to exclusion. And, we need to begin now to develop comprehensive and universally accessible services to support, not to replace, families in the rearing of their children. These services must be available to all families as a matter of right, and not because they demonstrate some particular inadequacy or some special need.

Some of what we need to do, like income support, could be easily done, had we the national commitment and will to do it. Other things, like job creation, will be more difficult; they will take decades; they will require constant experimentation and a persistent determination to accomplish our objectives. But the point is that we can and must begin, and we must begin not merely by helping the victims, but by identifying and then changing the forces

and structures of our society that undermine the vitality, the passionate care, the resourcefulness, and the moral commitment of the next generation.

In unguarded moments, we Americans are fond of confessing to our children that we have made a mess of the world or a mess of our lives, and encouraging them to do better. This is a cop out. It is almost impossible for children to create a society that is much better than the on. they grow up in. Instead of expecting our children to undo our individual failures and correct our social injustices, we the parental generation must do that now for their sake. We must not only try to create through our individual efforts as parents and carers for children a better generation of children, to create a better society for them to grow up in.